

UNCLASSIFIED

RELEASED IN FULL

Statement on Rwanda

By Herman J. Cohen
Senior Advisor
Global Coalition for Africa

To a joint hearing of the
Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs
and the
House Subcommittee on African Affairs

Wednesday, April 5, 1995

Honorable Co-Chairmen:

I appreciate your inviting me to participate in this hearing on the first anniversary of the Rwanda crisis.

In May, 1994, I expressed strong disagreement with the Administration's opposition in the UN Security Council to the rapid airlift of 5,000 African troops to Rwanda. It was my feeling then that the early presence of 5,000 African troops would have served as an inhibiting factor against the continuation of genocide against the Tutsi population. I still feel that the Administration misjudged the situation. Nevertheless, I want to give credit to the Administration, as well as to the French Government, for the subsequent despatch of their own troops to Rwanda which resulted in the saving of many thousands of lives.

One year later, both Rwanda and neighboring Burundi continue to be in crisis. Ethnic tensions remain high, and extremist elements in both the Hutu and Tutsi nations are gaining in strength at the expense of the moderates. There appears to be a "kill or be killed" mentality that is steadily infiltrating the national psyches in both countries.

The Administration's current policy of encouraging moderation and national reconciliation in both countries is correct. However, I feel that the United States should consider taking some additional steps, in an aggressive manner, to help the people of Rwanda and Burundi return to a state of political equilibrium and peaceful coexistence. In this regard, I would like to propose a three-part policy.

The three elements of my proposal are as follows:

- Majority rule with entrenched minority rights and power sharing.
- A regional refugee agreement under the auspices of the UN High Commission for Refugees.
- A strong emphasis on preventive measures, with the OAU in the lead, and the UN in a supporting role.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Let me briefly outline what I have in mind with this three-part proposal.

Majority rule with entrenched minority rights and power sharing:

The role model for this element is South Africa. Certainly, Rwanda and Burundi do not have a white-black racial situation as existed under apartheid. Nevertheless, there are strong parallels. The minority Tutsis fear an end to their ethnic identity and to their way of life if they do not control power. Their negative experience in Rwanda under 25 years of authoritarian Hutu rule, as well as last year's genocide, have to nobody's surprise contributed to this fear. Like the whites under apartheid in South Africa, the Tutsis are dominated by what I call the "condemned to rule" syndrome. "If we (Tutsis) do not rule, we are dead."

(Most analysts agree that the Habyarimana government in Rwanda, although Hutu, was a minority within a majority, and therefore not even representative of the overall Hutu population, much less the Tutsis. That may explain why last year's mass murders also victimized moderate Hutus, who were willing to share power with Tutsis.)

Despite what happened last year in Rwanda, I believe US policy should vigorously seek to persuade both Tutsi and Hutu that the route to stability in both countries must be a democratic system which will result in majority rule, but which will provide maximum guarantees to minorities through constitutional rights for all citizens, entrenched constitutional safeguards for minorities, and real power sharing.

I believe the 1993 elections in Burundi, which brought FRODEBU to power, were on the right track. I also believe that the Arusha agreement of August, 1993, if correctly implemented, could have brought Rwanda to an appropriate transition that would have met the criteria I have described above. In both cases, extremist elements with guns, decided to derail the transitions in a vain attempt to preserve their own grip on power.

Is it too late to bring both Rwanda and Burundi back to a path of democratic transition? I do not think that is the case. I feel we can reassure the majority of the Hutus (and undercut the Hutu extremists) by declaring unambiguously for majority rule. I feel that we can reassure the Tutsis by linking majority rule to real power sharing, individual rights, and minority guarantees subject to international scrutiny. In short, both countries need to replicate the South African compromise solution that is now in place, but with the requirement of more support from the international community than South Africa needed.

UNCLASSIFIED

A regional refugee agreement under the auspices of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees:

The members of the two Sub-Committees will recall that the crisis in Rwanda did not begin in April, 1994, but in October, 1991 when 3,000 Rwandan Tutsi troops from the Ugandan Army invaded their ancestral homeland under the RPF banner. They undertook this operation out of a romantic idea that they could open the doors of Rwanda to the return of several hundred thousand Tutsi refugees who had fled to Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Zaire 25 years earlier. (By decree of the Habyarimana government, the Tutsi refugees were forever prohibited from returning.) They expected to be received as liberators by a Rwandan people supposedly fed up with an authoritarian repressive regime. As we all know, the invaders were not greeted as liberators. Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans fled in advance of their arrival to become displaced persons in their own country. Fears of a return to Tutsi minority rule set the stage for the horrors that came along three years later.

I raise the issue of refugees because I feel that the refugee communities from Rwanda and Burundi who have had little hope of being able to return for the past three decades have been a major breeding ground and resource base for extremists trying to destabilize both countries. I believe that the United States should take the lead in seeking a regional refugee agreement that could help to remove the refugee problem from the overall ethnic equation.

The countries involved in the agreement would include Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire. The elements of such an agreement could include the following:

- The right of all Rwanda and Burundi refugees to remain in their countries of asylum and to obtain appropriate documentation as legal residents.
- The right of all Rwanda and Burundi refugees to return to their countries of origin and to regain their citizenship in those countries.
- The right of all Rwanda and Burundi refugees to travel freely between their countries of asylum and their countries of origin, regardless of where they decided to reside on a permanent basis.
- The establishment of an arbitration mechanism to settle disputes over land and property ownership.

I am sure that the negotiation of a regional refugee pact, with the active participation of the UNHCR, would bring out additional important elements. Although it would be costly to implement, I believe such a regional agreement

UNCLASSIFIED

could go a long way toward alleviating the pain of exile that nurtures extremist movements and actions.

A strong emphasis on preventive measures, with the OAU in the lead, and the UN playing a strong supporting role.

We all seem to agree that prevention is a lot cheaper than peace-making and peace-keeping. Yet, there has been a tendency lately in the UN Security Council and elsewhere to delay effective action, hoping that problems will somehow solve themselves. In Rwanda, the presence of UN peacekeepers inside the country, as well as in the refugee camps in Zaire is to be applauded. It is important that militias from the former Rwandan regime be disarmed as soon as possible. It is also important to stop armed "Palipehutu" extremists operating out of the camps in the Zairian border town of Uvira from infiltrating into Burundi.

The OAU has had a small military monitoring group in Burundi since 1993. This was one of the OAU's first conflict management initiatives taken under the new policy of becoming involved in the internal conflicts of member countries. It was also one of the first OAU initiatives taken independently of the United Nations, which has been reluctant to become too deeply involved in Burundi beyond the sending of a very capable special representative, Mr. Auld Abdallah.

With the situation deteriorating rapidly in Burundi, I recommend that the Administration consider a UN Cyprus-type operation that would involve a much larger number of monitors and peacekeepers than is now provided by the OAU, which has very limited resources. I realize that such an operation would be expensive at a time when the United States is seeking to reduce outlays for international peacekeeping. Nevertheless, it would probably be less expensive than the inevitable humanitarian outlays for disaster relief that would likely follow if preventive action is not taken. Most of the UN monitors and peacekeepers sent to Burundi could be from African countries, placing the major burden for coordination on the OAU, with the UN playing an overall supervisory and support role. A sufficiently large presence in Burundi, distributed within the most tense areas, would make it more difficult for the extremists on both sides to seek violent solutions. (A good example of the value of a foreign presence is now in place in Rwanda where UN Human Rights personnel are now engaged in "tactical monitoring". This involves surging monitors to areas of tension to make sure that potential atrocities are prevented by "foreign eyes".)

Above all, the international community should do as much as possible to demonstrate support for the FRODEBU government which appears to be truly committed to a moderate course of power sharing and gradual change.

UNCLASSIFIED

In Rwanda, the RPF military leadership has demonstrated a sincere desire to broaden the base of government to include all ethnic groups and political points of view. I would hope that in time, the process begun by the RPF will lead to a real democratic situation of majority rule with individual and minority rights. Where I feel the RPF is in error, however, is in its overemphasis on retribution for the genocide.

By all means, the Rwanda Government must pursue the Interhamwe and former government leaders who planned and directed the genocide. Those criminals must be tried as directed by the UN Security Council. What I see in Rwanda, now, however, is a pervasive atmosphere of revenge that encompasses the tens or hundreds of thousands of Hutus who were caught up in the April-June hysteria.

Unless a policy of national reconciliation is implemented to replace the current policy of mass retribution, I find it hard to see how Rwanda's Hutu refugees will return home in any significant numbers, thereby increasing the possibilities of a permanent state of tension and fighting. An analogy to the Palestinian refugee situation would not be an exaggeration. In effect, in the current atmosphere of semi-hysteria, very few Hutus can feel they are not in danger if they are under the control of the present government, or if they expect to be placed under that control in the near future. I know it is politically dangerous for any RPF leader to appear to be backtracking from retribution, but if the masses of Hutus are not reassured, Rwanda will never know real peace.

There have been a number of longer range solutions proposed for Rwanda and Burundi in recent months by citizens of those countries as well as by concerned friends of Africa. Such proposed solutions have included partitioning both countries into Hutu and Tutsi autonomous zones, and merging the two countries into neighboring states where they would be provinces of much larger entities. These scenarios may become relevant at some point if the situations in Rwanda and/or Burundi become totally untenable. Despite the growing fear and tension, I do not see significant support for such radical solutions in either the Hutu or Tutsi communities as yet.

For the time being, therefore, I believe the United States could make an important contribution by pursuing the policies I have outlined above.

Thank you very much.

-5-

UNCLASSIFIED